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REVOLUTIONARY REVIEWING:
SARAH TRIMMER'S
GUARDIAN OF EDUCATION

AN INDEX

by

ANDREA IMMEL

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OCCASIONAL PAPERS 4

THE
GUARDIAN OF EDUCATION,
A PERIODICAL WORK;
CONSISTING OF
A PRACTICAL ESSAY ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
FOUNDED IMMEDIATELY ON THE
Scriptures,
AND THE
SACRED OFFICES OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND:
MEMOIRS OF MODERN PHILOSOPHERS,
AND
EXTRACTS FROM THEIR WRITINGS,
EXTRACTS FROM SERMONS AND OTHER BOOKS
RELATING TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION;
AND
A COPIOUS EXAMINATION
OF
MODERN SYSTEMS OF EDUCATION.
CHILDREN'S BOOKS, AND BOOKS FOR YOUNG PERSONS;
CONDUCTED BY
Mrs. TRIMMER.

"The Religious Principle, if strongly inculcated, will secure the well-formed heart from every
indulgence—instead of passion; will inspire the mind with that unshaken, consistent, and universal
virtue, who naturally results from a just and extended view of God's moral government. From
this spring reflection, that we are placed here by our Creator to act a part, and that if we pro-
mote the end of his creation, the happiness of mankind, we shall assuredly obtain still higher
degrees of virtue and perfection."

DR. BROWN'S SERMONS.

VOL. I.

From MAY to DECEMBER inclusive, 1802.

LONDON.

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The Guardian of Education

REVOLUTIONARY REVIEWING:
SARAH TRIMMER'S
GUARDIAN OF EDUCATION
AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF
JUVENILE LITERATURE

An Index to *The Guardian*

by

A N D R E A I M M E L

With an Introduction

by

M I T Z I M Y E R S

*Department of Special Collections
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1990*

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I would like to thank the UCLA Center for the Study of Women for generously providing me with the mini-grant which funded the bibliographical work on this project. I also wish to express my gratitude to the Center for its ongoing support of my historical research on women writers and issues of gender and for fostering an intellectual forum both supportive and critically aware. I am equally grateful to the Department of Special Collections for its expertise and encouragement and to Andrea Immel, whose knowledge and tireless work on this project have been invaluable.

Mitzi Myers

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Lecturer, UCLA Writing Programs and English

*A genius pure from Envy's tainting gall,
Meek in reproach, and careless of reward*

So Jane West described her friend Sarah Trimmer in her obituary poem for the *Gentleman's Magazine* of March 1811. Other correspondents of the journal eagerly seconded this endorsement of Mrs. Trimmer as selfless “benefactor to the Nation at large” and urged that England commemorate her charitable and educational achievements by erecting a monument to her in St. Paul's Cathedral, like that of John Howard, the great prison reformer.¹ The proposal illustrates the magnitude of Mrs. Trimmer's reputation during the French Revolutionary era. But the “good Mrs. Trimmer” of pious legend wears another face. When she is noticed in modern literary and cultural histories at all, she figures most conspicuously not as the guardian of education, but as its gorgon, a monstrous egotist determined to imprint her own conservative image on English culture, charitable practice, educational provision, and childhood reading. Neither image is wholly correct, but the interplay between these alternative views emblemizes a key shift in English history with much larger implications than the interpretation of one writer. Once culturally potent, now canonically marginal, Mrs. Trimmer and what she stood for are timely topics for bicentennial reassessment.

1. Jane West, “To the Memory of Mrs. Trimmer,” *Gentleman's Magazine* 81, part 1 (March 1811): 261; G. H., Letter on “Monument to Mrs. Trimmer,” *Gentleman's Magazine* 81, part 1 (March 1811): 259.

In what has become the most often cited historical survey of children's literature, F. J. Harvey Darton pronounced magisterially some years ago, "The importance of Sarah Trimmer is that she *was* important. . . . The views of such a woman deserve sane examination." Darton rightly points to Trimmer's key role in constructing and representing her period's altering cultural climate. Yet his own very brief survey of Trimmer's importance offers no such analysis and rests upon unexamined assumptions, for example, that she was "non-political" and unreflective when she was neither:

She was ... *good*. She stood for all that solidity and stolidity which defeated Napoleon by not understanding him or realizing how huge was the menace of change. Stupid and intelligent at once; certain of all that was best in the past, yet blind to any decay; hardly aware, except by deprivations accepted in the plain course of duty and experience, that long life for all men is deciduous; severe (because she did not fully comprehend error), devout, and at the same time of great kindness — she lived an honourable career without doubts of herself or hesitation about public conduct.²

Nor has Trimmer fared better in the most recent attempt to situate her educational and philanthropic contributions historically. Vividly and abundantly illustrated though it is, Mary V. Jackson's text recuperates the development of British children's literature as the familiar dichotomy of Oberon and the fairies versus the conservatives and the moralists, a reading

2. F. J. Harvey Darton, *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life*, 1932, 3rd ed. rev. Brian Alderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 158.

of the past that partakes of the Romantic ideology of childhood it purports to analyze. The overview of Trimmer's politics in Jackson's chapter on "The Propaganda War in Lilliput" suffers from reliance on outdated secondary sources. Taking her information from A. Charles Babenroth's 1922 study of Wordsworthian childhood in relation to English poetry, Jackson transforms his undocumented reference to Trimmer into a propagandistic "tale for the lowly . . . in which Trimmer demonstrates how thrift, industry, and faith can overcome desperate poverty."³

But Babenroth's reference was not to a fiction by Trimmer, but to a factual "Extract from an Account of a Cottager's Family, at Hasketon; by John Way, Esq. Nov. 6, 1798" printed in the second, expanded edition of Trimmer's philanthropic vade mecum for ladies, *The Oeconomy of Charity* (1801). The thrifty widow of Hasketon's story does indeed elucidate Trimmer's cultural politics, but not because she is a fiction designed to dupe the poor. What is most striking about the

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3. A. Charles Babenroth, *English Childhood: Wordsworth's Treatment of Childhood in the Light of English Poetry from Prior to Crabbe*, *Columbia University Studies in English and Comparative Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922), p. 157; Mary V. Jackson, *Engines of Instruction, Mischief, and Magic: Children's Literature in England from Its Beginnings to 1839*, *Bison Books* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 181. Of Trimmer's charity and Sunday School readers, which were adapted by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge and were thus influential in early nineteenth-century educational provision, Jackson observes only that "data . . . is scarce," p. 181.

widow is Trimmer's characteristic way of emblemizing this real life heroine's story as "an extraordinary instance of what maternal affection" can accomplish.⁴

Trimmer's description applies to her own wide-ranging and ambitious career as well. That career needs to be examined not just in terms of its supposed conservatism, but also as the cultural production of a woman writer foregrounding issues of gender, an "extraordinary instance" of "maternal affection." Because Trimmer's rhetorical posture is always that of maternal guardian, it is fitting that reassessment should commence with the work that makes her persona explicit. This index and the forthcoming commentary devoted to Trimmer's *Guardian* and its implications will thus be a start toward the comprehensive examination that Darton called for a half century ago. Trimmer's large contribution to the shift in manners and mores that marks off Enlightenment from Victorian England is encoded in the most venturesome of all her pioneering projects, the *Guardian of Education* (1802-6). This five-volume periodical is repeatedly cited in historical studies of children's literature, but it is far more than the first systematic reviewing organ for children's books or even a retrospective history of juvenile literature to date, valuable as these achievements are. The work provides a useful entry into the period's popular, political,

4. Mrs. [Sarah] Trimmer, *The Oeconomy of Charity; or, An Address to Ladies; Adapted to the Present State of Charitable Institutions in England*, 2 vols. (London: J. Johnson, F. and C. Rivington, G. G. and J. Robinson, Longman and Rees, and J. Hatchard, 1801), 2: 106.

and women's culture as well, as the comprehensive index which follows demonstrates.

Mrs. Trimmer's own practice with her phenomenally successful series of scripture and historical prints and commentaries suggests an appropriate model for analyzing her contribution to the history of women, children, education, and English culture. Prints and commentary could be purchased separately or together, along with explanatory material detailing their uses. The richness of Mrs. Trimmer's volumes requires similar explication. This index to the *Guardian* proper is an invaluable document for students of historical children's literature in search of information about genres and texts; it is intended as a comprehensive bibliographical finding tool, more precise and usable than prior reference volumes. The analytical commentary in the companion volume will develop the meaning of the bibliographical categories and make accessible to a much broader audience the range of issues the *Guardian* addresses. What might be done with an educational tool, as Mrs. Trimmer sagely recognized, is not completely self-evident; users profit from guidance. Thus the bibliography will be supplemented by a separate commentary, just as were Trimmer's prints.

Explicating the *Guardian's* contribution suggests the diversity and complexity of early children's literature and showcases UCLA's Children's Book Collection; genres need to be described and illustrated as well as indexed. Histories to date have been dismissive toward early juvenilia; the material discussed provides the basis for a badly needed revisionist reading of early children's literature. The commentary also

illuminates numerous topics of interest to a far wider range of scholars than students of historical children's literature. The major categories which require analysis in the light of current revisionist literary, historical, and feminist theory include the following, each of which must be broken down into its components and related to its historical background and contemporary scholarship. The categories addressed epitomize key issues in current controversies about women, childhood, literature, and cultural change.

To understand what is going on in the *Guardian* is to acquire an in-depth education in how to read historical women's writing, for it is rich in such gender issues as women and language, women's choice of genres, women's entry into public life through the use of certain literary forms, the cultural construction of motherhood, the conflation of mothering and authorship, women's responses to Revolution, including their mode of political commentary, entry into public life, and contribution to educational innovation and cultural reform. Trimmer's volumes also illuminate the history of childhood — the cultural construction of childhood, the emergence of the Romantic ideology of childhood and children's reading that still warps literary history, controversies concerning the changing status of the child and the family — as well as children's literature proper: juvenile literature and the canon, types and genres, reviewing practices, theories of childhood reading, and controversies that persist even now, such as those over violence and over the suitability of fairy tales. Trimmer is invaluable in helping us to understand the emergence of children's literature as a separate field and in documenting what has persisted and

what has changed. She informs us about educational provision, for many types of schools and schooling appear in the *Guardian*, which provides a compact and comprehensive overview of the period's educational controversies; the work also yields helpful information relative to historical literacy, a key topic just now; pedagogy, methodology, and content are all treated.

With politics as with education, Trimmer enters into all the day's hottest controversies through the innocuous back door of children's book reviewing; her work documents the emergent ideologies of English nationalism and patriotism. All her writings are central to study of the period's philanthropy and religion, so that this periodical is a goldmine for anyone concerned with the formation of Victorian religious life; much of the journal's total space is devoted to explicit religious discussion, which requires elucidation, as does its record of charitable provision. Trimmer is in fact a conservative woman doing radical things via religion and philanthropy. The *Guardian* similarly throws light on publishing history and marketing practices; just one of Trimmer's pioneering contributions to the periodical press, this journal is part of a broader and more comprehensive project. It is a rich source for understanding the production and consumption of knowledge and literature. Trimmer helps us understand her period's conception of literature and knowledge as cultural commodities. These volumes also document shifting manners and mores; they are crucial for our understanding of cultural and social history and the strategies by which Victorian English values replaced eighteenth-century patterns. Trimmer's work embraces all classes and illuminates our understanding of their interrelation;

moreover, her connections with the classes below and above show how English nationalism emerged through new class coalitions and how English reform took such a different shape from that of France. Finally, the periodical reveals philosophical and intellectual attitudes; because the subject matter included is so diverse, it clarifies the period's habits of thinking on such central topics as the emergent contention between science and religion.

Mrs. Trimmer was specially concerned with visual literacy and a pioneer in the use of illustrations for pedagogic purposes. It will therefore be especially appropriate to represent the categories she helps us understand with material from the collection. Little has been done with early illustration; here too the explanatory volume will break new ground for investigation.

The companion numbers can be used together or separately, just as could Mrs. Trimmer's own productions. Like her work, they are structured to appeal to diverse audiences and understandings. Reviewing an alphabetically organized bibliography of early children's literature, the pioneering book collector Peter Opie observes of such an arrangement that it "makes manifest no progression . . . tells no story; that we are unable to see by its continuity the relationship that any one entry has with another." A more helpful scheme, he suggests, would have been to see all the related publications as "the integral parts of one great story: the rise and progress of the House of Newbery. . . . no work can be a great work . . . that simply documents its subject. . . . Some insight must hold it together, some passion give it life; the value of the work as a

whole must transcend the sum of its parts.”⁵ Without laying claim to the status of “great work,” we hope that these detailed resources will be useful in opening a rich research field to further exploration, that they will serve as integral parts of the great story of women’s entry into authorship.

5. Peter Opie, Review of *John Newbery and His Successors*, by S. Roscoe, *The Book Collector* 24.2 (Summer 1975): 265-67.

Note to the User

Scope: Authors and titles of all essays, extracts, book reviews and correspondence published in the *Guardian of Education* have been indexed here. However, only the book reviews and discussions of education have been fully subject-indexed. Thus Mrs. Trimmer's *Sequel to the Essay on Christian Education* and those pieces appearing in the regular features "Extracts" or "Memoirs of Infidel Authors" or which discuss theology or the Millenium have not been analyzed in depth. Publishers of the children's books have not been indexed: Mrs. Trimmer did not record the imprints in full. It would have been too time-consuming to identify them so that the listings for each bookseller would be complete and accurate.

Entries: Complete listings are provided for each piece under the author or the title for anonymous works. Imprints are recorded as Mrs. Trimmer gives them. Abbreviated entries with page numbers are given for titles, subjects and genres. Place of publication, unless otherwise noted, is London.

Arrangement: Authors, genres, subjects and titles are interfiled into one alphabetical sequence. For each topic or genre, subject sub-entries are listed first, with the list of books reviewed following. Any see-also references file at the end of the list of book reviews.

Note: Copies of books reviewed in the *Guardian* have been consulted whenever possible.

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| <p>A. L. B. See Barbauld, Anna</p> <p>A., L. M., correspondent, "Account of the Death of a Modern Philosopher," 4:253-256</p> <p><i>Abridgment of English Grammar</i> (Murray), 2:419</p> <p><i>Abstract of a Discourse</i> (Waterland), 4:343-357</p> <p><i>Abstract to the Preface of Bishop Horne's "Commentary,"</i> 3:178-179, 4:228-236</p> <p><i>Accidence</i> (Devis), 3:303</p> <p>Accomplishments: 1:369, 2:400-406, 429, 3:343, 350-352, 5:160, 190; dancing, 2:254-255, 401-402,</p> | <p>3:258, 350; drawing, 2:403, 3:159, 350, 352; music, 2:254, 400-401, 3:109-111, 350, 352, 4:414-416, 5:71-74. See also Education</p> <p>"Account of the Death of a Modern Philosopher" (A., L. M., correspondent), 4:253-256</p> <p>"Account of the Present State of Education in France" (Anonymous correspondent), 2:253-256</p> <p>Acton, Eugenia de (pseud.). See Lewis, Alethea</p> <p>Adam and Eve, 1:173-174, 2:203-206, 271-272, 502-504</p> <p>Adams, Rev. John, <i>Roman History, from the Foundation of Rome to the Subversion of the Eastern Empire,</i></p> |
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